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ABSTRACT

Traditional criticisms of existing graduate training in education are twofold: (1) that much of what passes for graduate research is trivial in nature; and (2) poor quality is apparent in dissertations and published research. In addition, some feel that the research done in graduate programs has little impact on real educational reform. There is another area in which training could be improved: training for the rigors of professional survival. More attention should be paid to developing succinct and appropriate writing skills for publishing in journals, grantsmanship, interpersonal and organizational competence, and teaching. In many of the above areas the current programs, by their neglect, are ill preparing graduates for the realities of professional existence. (Author/MSE)

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Doctoral Programs as Preparation for What?:

The Professional Training Perspective

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Abstract

Traditional criticisms of existing graduate training in education were briefly discussed. It was argued that there is an additional area in which graduate training could be improved. This area was described as training for the rigors of professional survival. It was suggested that more attention be paid to developing skill in the following areas: succinct and appropriate writing skills for publishing in journals, grantsmanship, interpersonal amd organizational astuteness, teaching skills. It was concluded that in many of the above areas the current programs, by their neglect, are ill preparing their graduates for the realities of their professional existence.

Doctoral Programs as Preparation for What?:

The Professional Training Perspective.

James S. Leming

What is the purpose of graduate training in education and research? Depending upon the answer to this question the focus of analysis and the resulting evaluations of specific graduate training programs may vary widely. This paper will first briefly review the traditional perspective on the purpose of doctoral training and then examine common critiques of existing programs. Next an alternative critique will be presented which deals with an important, but often neglected function of professional training in graduate education. Finally, recommendations for reform will be presented which are basic to the critiques discussed.

Doctoral training has traditionally been seen as a period of intense specialization designed to develop a combination of a depth of knowledge in a discipline and a demonstrated research capacity. The dissertation, a central focus of doctoral programs, has been viewed as an original contribution to human knowledge. The dissertation as well as the other requirements of the training program, imposes a great deal of pressure on doctoral students. The intensity of the training program is reflected in the fact that although doctoral programs in education are generally presented as three year programs, the median time span of enrolled years to obtain the degree is 6.7 years (NRC, 1968) and the attrition rate between the masters and the doctorate in the social sciences is 41 percent (Tucker, Gottlieb, and Pease, 1964). One rationale for the severity of graduate programs is based on Jencks and Riesman's (1968) analysis that graduate departments in sciences and humanities are really professional schools existing to produce

people who will staff other graduate departments. An implication of this perspective is that it is necessary to limit admission to the community of scholars to only the best. As W. S. Gilbert put it:

When ev'ryone is somebodee-Then no one's anybody.

The traditionalists themselves have been among the strongest critics of their own handiwork. Their concerns have taken two forms. First, they are concerned about the trivial nature of much of what passes for graduate research. They are fond of pointing to dissertation titles such as "The effect of the spatial location of pencil sharpeners on classroom climate" as examples of intellectual scholasticism and watering down of the standards which a doctoral degree represent. They also look derisively at the new Doctor of Arts degree and the Nova University off-campus doctoral programs as further erosion of the traditional standards of excellence.

Their second concern centers on the poor quality which is apparent in dissertations and published research. Grist for this mill comes from studies such as Ward, Hall and Schramm (1975) which asked scholars selected on the basis of their professional reputation in educational research methodology to judge 114 articles published in education in 1971. The judges found that 91 per cent of the articles either should have been revised to meet quality standards for educational research or should have been rejected outright. Their major recommendation is that the standards of academic excellence be insisted on and that doctoral programs not water down these standards for expedient political, economic or social purposes.

The other major challenge to existing doctoral programs besides the traditionalists themselves is characterized by a strong concern about the social-political implications of graduate training in education. This analysis

is not concerned solely with the capacity of the graduate students in education to make major contributions to their field of educational inquiry. Instead they view the existing programs in light of the potential contribution that can be made to the improvement of educational practice or the social value likely to be derived from their graduate's future work. These critics are fond of pointing to the paucity of impact that educational research has had in influencing educational reform in our society. Carl Bereiter (1965) has stated on perspective of this concern in the following manner:

> The proper question to ask in evaluating a field of applied research is, What changes have been brought about because of it? Applying this question to educational research of the last 30 years leads directly to an insight into its basic failing: The only major changes it has brought about have been changes in educational research itself - new measuring devices, new statistical techniques, and a general refinement in research methodology. One looks in vain for discoveries that have had any impact on the enterprise which educational research was intended to serve. There have been important innovations in education, to be sure - educational television, teaching machines, and, most notable of all, radically new curricula - but they did not come about from educational research discoveries. They have been "researched," to a greater or lesser extent, but they did not grow out of research, and their continued development owes very little to the research that has been done on them.

Some of these critics are revisionist or revolutionary when it comes to their analysis of American society and the roles of the educational establishment. They argue that graduate programs should produce action-oriented scholars who will attempt to use their knowledge and positions to correct malpractice in our schools and/or to reform schools in order to produce a populace more committed to a just and humane society. These critics claim that existing practice in educational research preserves a status quo that is inherently racist, sexist, and bent on supression of the poor.

In the past much of the dialogue over graduate training has centered around the two perspectives briefly sketched above: one group attacking those attempting to weaken what they see as the standards of intellectual rigor and scholarship, the other lashing out against scholarship geared only for self-satisfaction or a small circle of friends with no apparent payoff for the needed reform of education and/or society.

Although it is acknowledged that the above perspectives are significant viewpoints, this paper will take as its primary focus a third perspective on the appropriate goals of graduate training in education. This point of view will be called the professional perspective and its central concern will be taken to be: To what extent do graduate programs provide their students with the skills necessary for professional survival? That is, to what extent do the programs equip the candidates to deal successfully with the institutional and social-political environments they will find themselves in order to accomplish their professional goals, whether these goals involve the production of relevant and quality research or the reform of education and society, or some combination of both. The professional perspective argues that, regardless of one's focus in a graduate program, in order to realize one's professional goals, skills often ignored within graduate training programs are required.

This paper narrows, in two ways, the analysis of graduate training in education. First, it talks about the completion of the doctorate degree as the exemplar of graduate training. Doctoral programs represent the paradigm in the graduate training experience. They focus the problems inherent in many of the other graduate programs. A second limitation imposed on the analysis will be to discuss professional survival primarily as

survival within academia. I am well aware that by imposing these two limitations I may well avoid dealing with many relevant issues. However, it is argued that with these parameters the issues can be discussed with economy and that the area remaining within these limitations are significant issues of concern to sizeable numbers of educators.

In short, this paper will address itself to congruities and incongruities between doctoral programs and the requisites of professional survival. Specifically it will address two questions: 1. Are there aspects of doctoral programs that are dysfunctional to professional success? and 2. Are there areas of omission in existing doctoral programs that if filled could enhance graduates' ability to reach their professional goals?

Let me start the analysis by examining four domains in which the former graduate student must have astuteness in order to survive in academia:

1. Publishability - most of the major universities which emphasize research will require the equivalent of an article a year in print in order for the faculty member to continue his appointment. At smaller institutions this area generally is less important.
2. Teaching expertise - the faculty member must be able to avoid disastrous teaching experiences. One will notice that this does not say one must do well at teaching, but generally if one is incompetent in this area it should be a benign or quiet incompoetence. If one can succeed in the other three areas he can largely forget about this area. The exception to this rule is the smaller institution which does not emphasize research.
3. Grantsmanship - the more financially independent one can become the less he will have to depend upon the vagarities of university

administrations. Money talks loudly in these hard-pressed times.

4. Political Astuteness - if one is a cynic this can be described as the skill of knowing what to kiss and when. In more positive terms this refers to such skills as sentitivity and empathy and the ability to sustain positive relations in order to work effectively with others in areas of common concern. This also involves a working knowledge of the psychology of individual, group and institutional change.

Let me briefly describe how I see existing programs concerning themselves with these issues.

Many valuable skills may be acquired as a result of the dissertation experience, however, there is a sense in which the experience teaches the graduate student home run writing skills when in fact bunt singles and stolen bases are more appropriate styles for the publishing game. One need not think or write on the scale of a Toynbee or a Tolstoy to conceptualize significant problems for inquiry. Brevity in conceptualization and in writing style greatly enhances one's chances of getting ideas into print in an era where there is increasing competition for space in professional journals. What often is a 30 page chapter in a dissertation becomes a three sentence statement in a publishable article. For example, a random sample of 30 articles published in 1975 and indexed in Contemporary Journals in Education indicates that the average number of pages for the articles is eight with the range being from 2 to 23 pages. An examination of a random sample of 30 education dissertations indexed in the 1975 edition of Dissertation Abstracts International shows the average length to be 194 pages with the range 81 to 423 pages. It would appear that from the important perspective of economy of expression that the disseration is

dysfunctional as an exercise in preparing one for getting ideas in print.

Another major skill not dealt with in the disseration experience is the skill in writing for a specific journal audience and editorial board. Each of the journals has a philosophy and requires that the prospective author know for whom he is writing and what the editorial board is likely to approve. This skill is becoming increasingly important in light of the fact that the review period of manuscripts for many journals in approaching and exceeding 12 months. A significant manuscript sent to three inappropriate journals may not appear in print at the most advantageous time. In short, I see the dissertation exercise as dysfunctional in that it teaches conceptualization skills and writing skills which are hindrances to professional survival. Second, it fails to address the key goal of scholarly writing, namely to get one's ideas in print so that communication can take place.

The second vital area where I see existing doctoral programs failing has to do with what is commonly called grantsmanship. The ability to bring outside money into today's hard-pressed universities is an especially important skill. Very few graduate programs today teach any of the skills vital to the art of grantsmanship, for example, how and where to locate possible sources of funding, which sources are appropriate to one's needs, how to write up a proposal for a particular source, and finally how one gets an inside line or exerts political influence in order to get the grant approved. Here, as above, if one is successful in this area, i.e., brings in a large grant, the other areas necessary for professional success lessen in importance significantly.

The third area where current doctoral programs fail their

graduates is in the preparation for teaching as a career function. One of the paradoxes of graduate training in education is that it is training for research, yet it is certification for teaching. Most graduate schools are aware that this is a need but their response has been far from satisfactory. Koen and Ericksen (1967) found that half of the institutions offering graduate degrees said they offered programs to improve the teaching skill of graduates. Of the institutions offering such, 75 per cent reported the Teaching Assistantship as the main device; however, only half reported that the assistantship was supervised. As a result, unless one is lucky enough to get a teaching assistantship, he/she will not have experience in front of a college class and even if the candidate has teaching experience, there is only a 50-50 chance that it will be supervised by a skilled college teacher. The result is often that the graduate upon getting his first college position, if he is that lucky, will find himself in the position of a pedagogical virgin in regard to the teaching of graduates and undergraduates. In most major universities, where the publish-or-perish syndrome reigns this is not a critical omission; as a matter of fact, if one takes teaching too seriously he will find himself in trouble. However, from a moral point of view this omission in doctoral programs has a serious impact on the students who have come to be well instructed.

Finally, it is important to possess the necessary interpersonal skills and knowledge of the inner workings of institutions so that one may efficaciously go about one's business. The coin has two sides for the new faculty member: first, the interpersonal skills necessary to effectively interact with the staff and/or university in order to obtain the resources he needs to achieve his goals, and second, enough finesse to avoid

alienating the individuals involved. This domain also applies in the important areas of contacts with those outside the university who relate to one's professional goals. At smaller institutions, where collegiality is an absolute necessity for survival, this area of competence is of paramount importance.

There is no question that graduate training in education cannot meet all the future needs of its graduates. There will always be some training for professional competence which will be developed in the first position one holds. Of course, one's training isn't over when the degree is granted, however, it shouldn't be just beginning either. I believe that the deficiencies cited above do not call for a major change of the concept of graduate education; instead I believe that with a few changes doctoral programs as sketched above can be adapted to meet the professional needs of its candidates. The changes I propose at this time are neither complex nor far-ranging. Both Eble (1972) and Finger (1969) have suggested professional components for graduate training which meet many of the concerns of this paper.

First, I feel that in the place of the extended dissertation there should be substituted two of three article-length papers which represent sound contributions to the field, but also are written with publication in a professional journal in mind. This exercise would not only involve different skills not developed in writing a dissertation, but also would involve within the program some detailed analysis of the publishing domain and its criteria. At least one of the articles should be submitted in time to get a response so that this feedback could be analyzed while still in the doctoral program.

Second, the doctoral candidate should be directly involved in the writing of grant proposals at some time during his stay in the program. This could occur as a result of working with faculty involved in such activity or as a result of a specific course set up to instruct the novitiate in the relevant skills.

Third, the doctoral programs should have built into them teaching experiences supervised by skilled master teachers at the university. Finally, the programs should have components built into them which aim at strengthening the student's interpersonal skills, improving his skill at effective group functioning, as well as studying the psycholody and strategies of individual and group change. Experiences along the lines of those offered at National Training Laboratory or Esalen would seem appropriate to this end. Also, an introduction to the political and psychological structure of the department and university he finds himself in could provide valuable insights which would assist the candidate when he starts his professional career.

In short, this paper has argued that there are additional responsibilities of doctoral programs which in the past have taken a back seat to the scholarship emphasis. These additional responsibilities deal largely with skills not relevant to the scholarship issue, bur rather with the process side of institutional survival. Most new graduates will have to work within the existing educational and social institutions. Even if one rejects the Jencks and Riesman (1968) perspective on graduate training and desires a more active and socially involved view of the educational scholar, the same skills advocated above are essential to success. To acquire these skills and insights require a new emphasis in the graduate training of educational scholars.

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